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RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU PRIORITY 9719
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 0686
RUEHOT/AMEMBASSY OTTAWA PRIORITY 0721
RUEHCI/AMCONSUL KOLKATA PRIORITY 1330
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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 DHAKA 000622

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/09/2018
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [PINS](#) [KDEM](#) [BG](#)
SUBJECT: READY, SET, WAIT. SHEIKH HASINA DEPARTURE FOR U.S.
DELAYED BUT STILL EXPECTED SOON

REF: A. EXDIS DHAKA 608 B. DHAKA 609

Classified By: Ambassador James F. Moriarty. Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

SUMMARY

11. (S) Former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina did not leave Bangladesh for the U.S. the morning of June 9 as planned, but her Awami League confidantes and a senior government official told the Embassy that morning they expected her to depart within days. The delay appeared due in part to tying up bureaucratic loose ends that would allow her graft trials to continue in her absence. Bangladeshi media were reporting that her release from jail and travel abroad was imminent. Hundreds of supporters gathered at her special jail on the grounds of Parliament as news spread on June 8; there were no reports of unrest or unruly gatherings as of 1330 local time June 9. Former Prime Minister Khaleda Zia, who also is in jail on corruption charges, said she was unwilling to go abroad.

HASINA'S DEPARTURE DELAYED

12. (S) Hasina is President of the Awami League, which has refused to join a formal dialogue with the Caretaker Government on implementing political reforms and holding national elections in December unless she is released from jail. The government originally planned for her to fly to the U.S. on June 9 for medical treatment. Her release was delayed, however, pending court hearings on petitions to allow her to be represented by her lawyers at her trials in her absence. Four courts approved those petitions June 9; it was not immediately clear whether a similar petition required one more court's approval. The Chief Metropolitan Magistrate Court also approved a separate petition for return of her passport, which was seized when she was arrested.

13. (S) Hasina's special personal aide, Hasan Mahmud, and her security chief, Maj. Gen. (retired) Tarique Ahmed Siddique, said they expected her release soon but probably not before June 10. "It appears the delay is part of general inefficiency," said Hasan. While Tarique said he saw no "sinister" attempt to block her release, he said differences within the regime about how to deal with her may have caused the delay. Home Secretary Abdul Karim confirmed to the Deputy Chief of Mission that Hasina would leave very soon. The military Directorate General of Forces Intelligence told the High Commissioner of Canada that Hasina would depart by the

end of the week and requested a Canadian visa for her. Meanwhile, government prosecutor Sharfuddin Khan Mukul said publicly the government would release Hasina as early as the evening of June 9.

WILL KHALEDA ZIA ALSO GO ABROAD?

¶4. (S) There have been rumors that the Caretaker Government wants Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) Chairperson Khaleda Zia to leave the country as well. (Note: The BNP also says it will not participate in formal dialogue until Khaleda is released from jail. End note.) One of her relatives told the Embassy that Khaleda was under government pressure to leave the country with her two imprisoned sons, Tarique Rahman and Arafat Rahman Koko. Local media reported, however, that she said at a court appearance on June 8 she had no desire to go abroad.

COMMENT

¶5. (C) As of right now, Post continues to believe that Hasina will depart Bangladesh shortly. It is much less clear what the coming days will bring with respect to Khaleda Zia. In any event, the changes that are likely to occur in the coming days could have a major impact on Bangladesh's path back to democracy.

Moriarty